

Selected Facts About Children's Suggestibility*

Taken from

Memory and Suggestibility Research:

Does the Surreal World of the Laboratory Apply to the Real World?

by

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1. Children, even very young children, can lie. Most parents know this already, but a number of studies confirm it. *See Ceci & Bruck, Suggestibility of the Child Witness: A Historical Review and Synthesis*, 113 PSYCHOLOGICAL BULLETIN 403, 425-427 (1993).
2. Younger children are more suggestible than older children. In general, once children reach the age of ten, they are no more suggestible than adults. John E.B. Myers, Gail S. Goodman, Karen Saywitz, *Psychological Research on Children as Witnesses: Practical Implications for Forensic Interviewers and Courtroom Testimony*, 27 PACIFIC LAW JOURNAL 1, 26 (1996).
3. Though relevant, the new wave research is less applicable to the majority of interviews of abused children. Consider this:
 - a. The average age of alleged victims in sexual assault cases is 10 years old, as opposed to the pre-schoolers in the new wave research. *See Thomas D. Lyon, False Allegations and False Denials in Child Sexual Abuse*, 1 PSYCHOLOGY, PUBLIC POLICY AND LAW 429 (1995)
 - b. Most investigative interviews occur shortly after the report of abuse and do not involve the long delays between the target events and suggestive questions used by new wave researchers. Lyon, *supra*, at 433.
 - c. Most real world victims are abused by close family members. Closeness between the victim and the offender increases the child's resistance to falsely reporting abuse. Lyon, *supra*, at 433.
 - d. Most real world cases involve one victim, not the multiple victims in cases such as *Michaels*.

- e. Although many abused children are interviewed as many as 11 times, these interviews are of children who have *revealed abuse*. In contrast, the interviews in the new wave research involve multiple interviews of children who have *denied* an event. The new wave researchers then repeatedly interview the kids to get them to adopt the intentionally false statement of the interviewer. See Lyon, *supra* at 434.
- f. Although coercive or misleading questioning may result in a false *report*, it does not necessarily produce a false memory. When researchers “gently challenge” a child’s false report, such reports are reduced 50%. Lyon, *supra*, at 435.
- g. Keep in mind that even though most real world interviews involve elements different from the new wave researchers, even the coercive practices employed in that research produced only a *minority* of false reports.

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